

Snuffles In Repose

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Snuffles In Repose

by [brightened](#)

Summary

Severus doesn't want to be responsible for Sirius Black trapped in his Animagus form. When Albus Dumbledore is around, it's not as though he has any choice. Complete.

Chapter 1

“Absolutely not,” Severus hisses.

“Oh, are you having trouble hearing?” Albus lifts his wand. “A buildup of earwax, perhaps? I know just the spell.”

“No, no,” Severus hastens to assure the headmaster. “My hearing is just fine.”

“Then I’m quite confused as to why you believe you have any say in the matter.” Albus’s twinkling smile never falters but the finality of his words are clear. Severus can only curl his lip in answer.

He is not sure how a pleasantly warm summer day has turned into the sixth worst day of his life. Oh, wait, he’s forgotten about the day he accepted the dare to eat flobberworms. Seventh worst day, then.

“It will be very little extra work for you,” Albus is now saying as he begins to rummage through his desk. “I have a very trustworthy, very talented friend who will be stopping by each week to perform an exam and deliver his food. Other than setting out two meals and taking him on one walk a day, your life should be otherwise unhindered.”

Albus locates what he was searching for and places it atop his desk. There, on top of a stack of mussed parchment, is a leather collar with dangly silver tags and a matching red leather leash.

“Take it, please,” Albus says in a way that almost makes Severus forget it’s a command.

“This is incredibly demeaning,” Severus says. He shrinks the items and places them in a robe pocket. “There are at least two dozen countries that would define this as cruel and unusual punishment.”

“For which one of you?”

Severus is spared answering when Albus’s fireplace roars to life but the reprieve is brief. The fire’s green flames admit a very familiar know-it-all. No sooner does she stand and shake soot off her robes than another shape tumbles out of the fire and into the office.

It’s a dog. A rather sizeable dog that Severus is sure he can smell from where he sits. He glares at the dog and the dog responds with a snarl.

It is a tiny bit intimidating.

Wait, how did a dog floo?

“Thank you, Hermione,” Albus says. “Lemon drop?”

“Sure, thank you,” Hermione says. She accepts the sweet and drops it into her pocket. “We’re ever so busy at the Department, I must get back.” She casts an anxious glance at the dog and then, with all the subtlety of a Niffler that’s found gold, turns to include Severus in her gaze. “Are you sure this is the best idea?” She’s asking Albus but she’s staring at Severus, troubled.

He decides to take ten points from Gryffindor as soon as he leaves the room.

“Your concern is admirable,” Albus answers. “Lemon drop?”

Hermione sighs and reaches for another yellow ball. It, too, gets pocketed.

“I’ll be leaving then.” She turns to the dog and pats it bracingly on the head. “It’ll be okay. I’ll come visit every week and I’ll be researching while we’re apart. I’m pretty sure I read about this happening before in 1737.”

The witch prattles on and Severus stops listening. Instead he stares at the bowl of lemon drops. He tries to count them but there’s too many. He thinks he sees a coating of white fuzz on the bottom layer of candies.

Hermione finishes speaking. The dog begins to whine as she turns back to the fire and she looks absolutely stricken with guilt. Severus finds it preferable to her usual look.

As soon as she’s gone, the dog pads over to the large wall of windows and rears up on his hind legs. He stares out the window across the grounds of Hogwarts - at Hagrid’s hut. Then he turns and looks at Albus quite pointedly.

“I’m sorry, no.” Albus looks less sorry than the Dark Lord would be at Harry Potter’s funeral. “You need to be somewhere secluded to ensure there is no one around to report you to the Ministry.”

The dog barks. Severus doesn’t speak dog but the bark is clearly not a very polite one. Albus seems to be getting mildly peeved.

“Really now! You will go to Spinner’s End and that’s the end of it.” Albus sticks his hand into the lemon drop bowl and tosses several drops into his mouth. “Now get going.” He sucks on the candies, mouth puckering under a face drawn up in displeasure. “Floo powder is on the mantel.”

Severus stands and crosses the room to the fireplace. “Let’s go, mutt,” he says and the dog growls unhappily as he trots over.

“Use his name,” Albus admonishes. Severus grits his teeth at being reprimanded like a schoolboy.

“Fine,” he snaps. “Let’s go, *Snuffles*.”

Severus could not bring himself to say the name of the wizard who was now trapped inside the dog, although he knew, and Albus knew, as you know, dear reader, that the monstrous miserable dog was indeed Sirius Black.

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It’s not fair, is all Severus can think. Well, *it’s not fair* and *damn Albus and is that dog hair in my coffee*?! That last thought sends him to the sink where he empties the offending mug. *Can’t even caffeinate myself in peace*.

To be fair (which Severus would never be aloud) it’s not that Snuffles is such an imposition. He mostly sleeps. He’s even figured out how to open the backdoor and lets himself out for walks. Severus is appreciative that the red collar has yet to make an appearance.

However, Severus thinks he’s earned some peace and quiet after nine months of babysitting. He also can’t stop questioning why Albus had chosen him. Why not Potter, Lupin, Granger? Why not Albus himself?

It’s not fair.

Severus exits the kitchen and retires to the study where he promptly buries himself under a mountain of books. He reads on a range of topics, discarding a book mid-page as soon as his interest wanes. He absorbs information on Dark Arts theory, the history of Muggle torture, and how to get a tan without burning.

Severus is regarding his pale forearm critically when the door creaks open and Snuffles trots in, ears perked up in what could only be described as a playful expression.

“May I help you?” Severus asks coldly. Snuffles barks twice and places his front paws on the sofa. The dog starts a long whine when Severus instinctively reaches out and pushes him back down. “Not on the furniture! No animals on the furniture.” Severus has a very good idea of what indignant protests Snuffles would be making if he could talk and so, with a smile, Severus adds, “Bad dog.”

Snuffles reacts with lightning speed and nips Severus on the leg. He hears the sound of robes ripping and feels the beginning of a slow burn. The sensation is horribly reminiscent of being bitten by Hagrid’s three-headed beast.

Severus withdraws his wand and points it at Snuffles chest. Then he frowns. “I can’t kill a dog,” he says to himself. “But I can kill a wizard. This is really just a wizard. So I can kill this dog, right?” His musings are interrupted by a very loud, moderately scary bark. Snuffles makes a swipe for the wand and Severus quickly pockets it before it can get snapped. “Fine. No killing.” Moving slowly, both to favor his leg and to throw Snuffles off his trail, Severus returns to the kitchen.

The two bowls he set out in the morning are mostly untouched. By the time Snuffles follows him, Severus has placed both bowls on top of the counter, just out of a dog’s reach. When this particular dog sees this, he growls. He moves to bite Severus again but this time Severus manages to dodge out of the way. He cringes thinking what he must look like, flopping around, arms flailing awkwardly to maintain his balance.

He manages to avoid Snuffles and get out of the house whereupon he promptly spells the front door shut.

It takes roughly forty seconds for Severus to realize the error he’s made. He has nowhere else to go and nothing to do. So, slow starvation is not the best plan.

With a heavy swallow and flaming cheeks, Severus unlocks the door and steps back into home.

Snuffles whips his head around, eyes growing comically wide, and finishes shitting on the carpet.

Severus decides he can kill a dog, after all, and fires off a curse. Snuffles yelps and manages to roll over out of the path of the silver beam. He hits the wall with a thud. Severus casts another curse and misses by an inch, blasting a hole in the wall and showering Snuffles with debris.

Severus moves to lift his wand again but his hand does not cooperate. In fact, he finds his entire body in rebellion, and can move nothing more than his eyes. He scans the room and out of the corner of his eye sees the edge of a cloak.

Snuffles climbs to his feet and shakes, sending wall dust and chunks across the carpet. He casts a very hateful look (for a dog) at Severus and pads over to the person with the cloak.

“I really did not believe you would harm a dog.” Oh. Albus. The weekly check in. Severus has enough mobility with his eyeballs to roll them.

“Poor Sirius,” says Granger, stepping into Severus’s line of sight. She uses her hand to brush the

dog's fur clean and then rubs his head. He whines and wiggles as close to Granger as possible.

"I'm going to release you," Albus says, "and we are going to sit in the living room and fix this."

One very boring conversation later, Severus has promised a dozen times to control his temper, and Granger graciously agrees to clean up the dog poop. Snuffles lays down and covers his eyes with his paws while she spells the dropping away and then turns her wand to the carpet.

"Have you seen the Prophet?" Albus asks and, without waiting for an answer, digs into his robes and pulls out a rolled up newspaper. "Would you please read it aloud for all of our benefits?"

Severus scowls but opens the paper and reads, "First illegal Animagus captured in Ministry sting; reward offered for more." Snuffles sits up and his ears perk up as he listens, Severus assumes, very intently. "The Daily Prophet can exclusively reveal that the Ministry of Magic is hard at work cracking down on sophisticated criminals. It has long been suspected that unregistered Animagi exist among us. Aurors at the Department of Magical Enforcement have enacted a jinx that detects Animagus transformation magic and, since it can not be traced, locks the Animagus into their animal form. Any wizard or witch wishing to undo the jinx must present themselves to the Ministry for appropriate spellcasting and subsequent time at Azkaban. The first Animagus to have done so, Helena Way, refused to comment as she was escorted out of the Ministry, carrying the bird cage with which her cousin allegedly captured her. Her cousin is reported to have received a reward of 5000 Galleons and the Ministry confirms more rewards are available for each Animagus turned in."

Severus hands the newspaper back to Albus.

"I could really use 5000 Galleons," he says and is rewarded with an undignified squawk from Granger.

It takes another very boring conversation for Severus to convince Albus he was only joking.

The next week passes uneventfully. Granger returns alone and updates Snuffles on her lack of progress on undoing the jinx. Severus drinks his coffee and calculates how many vials of beetle blood he could buy with 5000 Galleons.

It takes three more weeks for Granger to fall out of the fire, jump to her feet, and announce, "Sirius, I have good news!" She looks at Severus, "Er, good-ish."

"He's not going to answer you," Severus drawls and, to his disappointment, she beams.

"Exactly!" she says and pulls out her wand, pointing it between Severus's eyes. "Now, stand still, the both of you."

"You won't murder me for that dog!" Severus snaps and reaches for his wand. Before he draws it out Granger, sounding very annoyed, says some incantation he doesn't recognize and a jet of purple light hits him in the forehead.

It tingles. The tingle spreads across his face, across his neck and shoulders, and soon his whole body tingles. It's quite distracting and he forgets about cursing Granger, only watches as she points her wand to the dog and does the same thing.

Just as the tingles fade, a new sensation starts, a mildly painful burn that starts in the center of his forehead and then blooms to cover his scalp.

"What did you do?" he asks, knuckling his head.

“A Mind Joining spell,” Granger says. “I read about them ages ago, I’ve always wanted to try it out, and this seemed like the perfect situation. Now you two can actually communicate.”

“A-?” Severus whispers but his quiet words go unnoticed as Snuffles breaks out in a series of angry barks.

“Oh, I’m sorry, Sirius,” she says with what Severus suspects is genuine contrition. “But it’s better this way, you’ll see.” She reaches out to pat Snuffles on the head and he snaps at her fingers.

“Fine! Be that way. I’ll see you both next week.” She steps into the fireplace with her arms crossed over her chest.

Severus looks at Snuffles and Snuffles looks back. After a moment, words come to Severus’s mind, like a thought but in a voice that is distinctly not his own.

“At least tell me you don’t wank, Snape. I don’t want to hear any part of *that*.”

Chapter 2

Severus is having a wonderful dream. He's flying on a broomstick. The wind whistles around him but it's not cold and he's speeding past a lake at sunset. Everything is quiet, there might as well be no one else in the world, his Dark Mark doesn't hurt, and his best friend that came to hate him isn't dead.

"Snape."

Severus starts at his name and nearly falls off his broomstick. He sits up and looks around. He's eager to see this dream person his brain has conjured. If he created them, they can't be so bad.

"Snape." Severus tries to call back to the person but his mouth doesn't move. Instead, his broom starts to drift down, and soon his feet are submerged. The water is not cold and gentle waves lap at his bare feet pleasantly.

"Heyyyy, Snape!"

Severus opens his eyes - his real eyes. He blinks, looks around, sees nothing out of the ordinary, and then looks down. A very unbecoming shriek rips out of him as he takes in the sight of Snuffles licking his toes and in his eagerness to escape the dog's tongue he twists himself up in his sheets and falls to the floor.

"Finally, you're awake," Snuffles says. Well, he thinks it, and Severus hears it, and we're all just going to count that as him saying it, okay?

Severus doesn't answer until he's untangled himself.

"I hope you have an excellent reason for *licking* me," Severus says, regretting that he agreed to no longer hex Snuffles. When he says things, he actually says them. He's not quite willing to fully commit to telepathic communication with Sirius Black.

"Last time you weren't so keen when I emptied my bowels on your rug," Snuffles says. If a dog could smirk, Severus would swear this one was.

"If I recall correctly, neither was Miss Granger," Severus says. He would feel some sort of satisfaction at the answering whine if his toes weren't still wet with dog drool.

"Moving on," Snuffles says, "I need to go outside and the door is jammed." Severus sighs and leads the dog out to the back door. It is, indeed, stuck and Severus has to pull quite hard to open it. As soon as he does, Snuffles bounds out into the grass. Severus is quick to close the door and busy himself making coffee. Seeing the Animagus poop once was more than enough.

Severus drums his fingers as he waits for the machine and Snuffles trots back inside before the water is done boiling.

"Tea not good enough for you?" he asks as he spins in a neat circle and lays down on the kitchen floor. He drops his head to rest on his crossed paws and looks up at Severus with dark round eyes.

"Not enough caffeine," Severus says a bit unwillingly.

"Why not drink a pepper-up potion?" Snuffles asks.

“You wouldn’t ask if you’d ever experienced 1000 milligrams of caffeine short circuiting your nervous system,” Severus says and Snuffles lifts his head.

“Sounds horrible,” he says. “Let me have some.”

Severus eyes the dog and then turns to the coffee pot and eyes that, too. He can feel a headache starting at the mere thought of all the insufferable things a caffeinated Snuffles would beam into his brain. Yet for an inexplicable reason he finds himself grabbing the dog’s water bowl, emptying it into the sink, and filling it with roughly half a liter of coffee. Then he places the bowl down and pours his own cup as Snuffles pads over and begins to lap it up. Severus sips as he considers their situation.

It is only the third day since Granger connected their minds and conversing is still discomfiting. He had immediately written to Albus and demanded the countercurse. Meanwhile, Snuffles spent the first twelve hours thinking as many curse words as he could before devolving into his true self of a perpetual eleven-year-old and singing obnoxious lyrics on repeat.

Severus had delved deep into the skill set he’d used to survive as a spy and ignored all of it. He’d been very zen about it all, actually. It was a lot easier when he reminded himself Snuffles was stuck as a dog while he still had a completely functional human body, and if he happened to think that *very smugly and loudly* in Snuffles’s direction, well, that wasn’t going against his promise to Albus, was it?

Somehow, over the second day, the tension between them had fizzled out and settled into a resigned and very temporary truce. They were stuck with each other and Severus could admit being able to communicate did make things easier, at least until Albus owled him back.

However, the foot licking could not happen again.

“The foot licking can not happen again,” Severus says. Snuffles stops gnawing on his own paw to look at him.

“I already told you I needed to go outside,” Snuffles huffs. “What else could I have done?”

“Perhaps I’ll install a doggie door,” Severus says. He watches the dog drink the last couple drops from the bowl. “I may be asking this question too late but can dogs have caffeine?”

“Not a, er, Muggle dog, no,” Snuffles says. “I’m still a wizard underneath it all.” Snuffles begins to scratch his neck with his back paw. “That’s my theory, anyway. Guess I’m going to find out.”

Severus smiles for a moment before he remembers he hates the wizard underneath it all. He quickly smooths his face into his very best aloof sneer and takes his coffee into the library. Once he settles into his armchair, he becomes very aware of how quiet his mind has become. Within that realization, he knows Albus needs to send the countercurse, and soon.

Later, he finds Snuffles in the backyard, furiously digging a very wide hole and growling as he does so. Later still, Snuffles runs in frantic circles, enthusiastically declaring he *will* catch his own tail. Even later, the dog collapses in the kitchen on his back, muddy paws resting against his chest, tongue lolling out his mouth with each pant. Severus frowns at the muddy paw prints on the kitchen tile as Snuffles says, “I think I’ll stick with tea from now on.”

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The next time Granger appears she is merely a head in the fireplace and refuses all attempts by Snuffles (mostly, barks and tail wags) to entice her into emerging.

“I know you’re probably sore with me,” she says. “I haven’t forgotten you tried to bite me.”

“I’m sorry,” Snuffles says, but remember that he is merely thinking it and Severus alone hears it. Severus grits his teeth against the indignity of being a messenger for a dog but then tells Granger anyway. She breaks out into a wide grin.

“Oh, I knew the spell was a good idea! Sirius, now that we can actually talk, how are you?” Snuffles launches into a diatribe but Severus shakes his head.

“I’m not a dog-to-witch translator,” he snaps. “Why don’t you join your minds and leave me out of it?”

The smile on Granger’s face is instantly pinned on, a thin veneer over what Severus suspects to be fear. It is admittedly more difficult to tell emotions amidst the green flames.

“Well, that’s not how the spell works, is it?” she says and he definitely detects anxiety now. “Once two minds are joined, the connection is permanent. Trying to connect more than two minds has always resulted in serious consequences including, but not limited to, the death of all involved.”

“Permanent?” Snuffles repeats in stunned disbelief. The word echoes in Severus’s mind so much he’s not sure which one of them is thinking it.

“It’s not so bad, though,” Granger rushes to add, looking from Severus’s stony face to Snuffles’s stony muzzle. “The spell operates on proximity. Once the Animagus trap is lifted and you two separate, you won’t hear each other’s thoughts anymore.” Granger clears her throat and then glances over her shoulder. “Oh, Ron, what was that? It’s time for lunch. Oh, well, darn, sorry Sirius. Guess I’d better go. See you both next week!” It sounds very much like she is inventing an excuse to leave. Severus suspects the Weasley is not even there.

Her head disappears from the flames and they return to their usual hues. Severus sinks down onto the closest piece of furniture, which ends up being a glass coffee table bearing a cup of coffee. The cup tips over under the weight of his buttocks and the dark warm liquid spreads across the glass to drip steadily down onto the carpet.

“I think that’s some kind of metaphor for our situation,” Snuffles says. He’s splayed out before the fire and already looks completely unconcerned, having apparently come to terms with their situation very rapidly.

“Are we the table or the carpet?” Severus asks.

“I think we’re the coffee,” Snuffles answers with very affected thoughtfulness. “The table is the Ministry. Your arse is Dumbledore.” Severus snorts, amused despite himself, and spells the spilled coffee away.

“You’re losing it,” Severus says.

“I survived twelve years in Azkaban with my mind mostly intact,” Snuffles says. “I won’t lose it now.”

“I second the mostly.” Snuffles barks a laugh into his mind and it’s the same laugh that taunted Severus throughout his youth. The slight goodwill Severus is feeling dissipates at the memories the sound draws forth. “If we can’t sever the connection between our minds, then there is only one path forward. I need to undo the hex the Ministry placed to keep you transformed.”

“Right,” Snuffles says. “Dumbledore can’t figure it out but I’m sure you’ll have much better luck.”

“I don’t need luck,” Severus says. “I have a potions lab.”

Chapter 3

Severus discovers quickly that he actually does need luck. Quite a lot of it, too. The instances of potions that undo spells are few and far between. The chances wouldn't be so bleak if Severus could at least study the original curse but, alas, the Ministry was not willing to share such secrets with him. (He didn't ask, for the record. He is desperate but not stupid.)

Severus spends the last few weeks of summer refreshing his memory on the properties of potion ingredients and sketching out potential recipes. It begins to feel like a waste of time.

Four days before the start of term, Albus steps out of the fire. Severus looks up from a book on various winter plants and feels a bit peeved at the unannounced intrusion.

“I could have been disrobed,” he says as a greeting.

“I assumed with you hosting Sirius, you’d always be at least somewhat presentable,” Albus says with a smile that sets a small alarm bell ringing in Severus’s head. There’s some hidden layer to what Albus is saying, some inside joke, and Severus can’t deduce what it is. That’s never a good thing. That means he’s missing important information.

“Snuffles sleeps most of the day, I could walk around naked if I wanted to,” Severus says defiantly, though he has no desire to do such a thing. “And it’s not as though he feels the need to cover himself up. I’m terrifyingly familiar with certain *things* of his.” It was hard not to be. Animagi did not get neutered.

“Dog nudity aside,” Albus says, “I came here to discuss your return to Hogwarts.”

“What of it?” Severus asks.

“How do you envision Sirius fitting in to it?”

“You claimed he had to come here to keep him away from people that would recognize him as an Animagus and turn him in,” Severus says, slowly, the alarm bell ringing louder still. “I don’t see how allowing him to traipse around Hogwarts would keep him hidden.”

Albus waves a hand and says, “Oh, that was before Miss Granger allowed you two to communicate. Surely it wouldn’t be fair to separate Sirius from the one person he can speak to.”

The argument is so nonsensical that Severus says nothing.

“I will take your silence as agreement! Excellent. Simply floo to your quarters as usual and bring Sirius with you. I’ll make the necessary adjustments to your quarters. See you both then!”

Severus leaves the room and finds Snuffles dozing on his bed. He reaches out to shake the dog awake but his hand stills as he feels the fur. He’s never touched Snuffles before and he’s surprised by how soft he is. He runs his fingers through the black fluff and an odd peace settles over him.

“Are you petting me?” Snuffles asks without opening his eyes. Severus leaps away from the dog and tucks his hands behind his back as though that erases what he’d been doing.

“Of course not,” Severus says coldly. “I was waking you.”

“By petting me,” Snuffles says and yawns widely as he stretches, rolls to his stomach, and then sits

up. "I don't mind. I am a dog. I have some kind of primal desire to be pet and Hermione doing it once a week is just not enough."

"I'm not going to pet you," Severus snaps.

"Again," Snuffles says. Severus is sure if he was in human form he'd be smiling.

"Albus said you're going to Hogwarts," Severus says in a desperate attempt to change the subject. It works. Snuffles barks.

"Why wasn't I there this whole time, then?"

"I asked the same thing," Severus says and for a moment they sit in silent angry bewilderment.

"Not that being here has been so bad," Snuffles says eventually. "The grass in your yard smells really interesting."

"You're joking," Severus says.

"I am, a bit, yeah." Snuffles leaps down off the bed and Severus notices for the first time where the dog was napping and that, worst of all, he doesn't really mind. It's gotten very hard to remember he hates the person inside the dog. Snuffles is pretty tolerable, all things considered.

"You're not so bad either," Snuffles says and Severus instinctually scowls, even as he notes it's the first time Snuffles has heard a thought that Severus didn't intentionally think at him. Did that mean something? Was the enchantment growing stronger?

The concept of being unable to think private thoughts is rather terrifying and Severus takes a moment to wish very fervently that Hogwarts holds some missing key to getting them out of this mess. He fails to notice that it's been several weeks since he contemplated turning Snuffles in as a solution.

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"In the locker room, Severus, can you believe that?" Minerva says with a shake of her head. Her usually pinched face is slightly more relaxed, both cheeks circled in red likely due to the firewhiskey she holds in her hand.

"Can I believe that two teenagers allowed their hormones to override their good sense?" he asks. "Easily." She slams her glass down on the table and with the forceful movement her hat falls askew.

"Not just two teenagers! The Quidditch captain and his seeker. If the other players find out, they'll probably demand removal of them both." Minerva sighs and picks her drink back up. She drains it in several large gulps. "Now, don't you go telling any Slytherins!" She actually wags her finger at him, inches from his nose. Severus answers with a sneer.

When Albus had proposed a staff Halloween party at the Hog's Head, Severus had been opposed to the point of refusal. Then somehow Snuffles had found out and he'd gone rabid at the idea of leaving the castle. He'd barked nonstop for five minutes and then, after Severus had silenced him, he thought very loud barks that were somehow even more aggravating.

After half an hour Severus had agreed on the condition that Snuffles wore the red leash. He'd expected the dog to bark but he seemed extremely unbothered. Severus was not as skilled in irritating dogs as humans, he supposed.

Now Snuffles sits at Severus's feet under the table, ears perked up, a dopey happy look on his furry face as his tongue lolls out of his mouth. Rosmerta had worked herself into an instant fit at the sight of a dog entering her establishment. Albus had pulled her aside and orchestrated a whispered conversation during which Severus caught the words, "emotional support animal." Later, she had come over to Severus, patted his head, and offered him free Butterbeer for the night.

It is all quite humiliating and being forced to listen to Minerva's chattering is not improving his mood.

"He needs a walk," Severus says abruptly and stands. Snuffles begins to whine but Severus practically drags him out on the leash, ignoring the stares of the rest of the staff.

"That hurts, you know," Snuffles complains as they step outside.

"Should've come with me," Severus says unapologetically. Since returning to Hogwarts, Severus had acquiesced to fully telepathic communication and no longer verbally spoke to Snuffles. It is admittedly convenient.

It's cold outside and he realizes he left his cloak in the booth. He crosses his arms against the chill.

"Should've trained me better," Snuffles says. Severus snorts. They walk for a moment in silence before Snuffles continues. "I still don't understand how Albus is okay with all this."

"The mind of Albus Dumbledore is a terrifying place," Severus says and Snuffles barks in agreement. "This entire situation has made me realize how foolish it is to even attempt to understand him."

Abruptly, without any warning at all, the leash jerks out of Severus's hand, and he comes to a startled standstill as he watches Snuffles dart away. The red leash trails behind him, at first glimmering in the streetlight before it disappears in the dark off the path. Severus curses and pulls his wand out.

"Lumos," he says aloud and, wand alight, walks to the last place he saw the leash. "Snuffles, Black, dammit!"

"Sorry!" Snuffles trots back into view as suddenly as he left. Severus is mildly disquieted to see the limp rabbit hanging from his jaws. "Told you this damn dog has a mind of its own." Snuffles drops the rabbit onto the cobblestone path and paws at it. "He wants to eat this so bad, ugh. I've eaten enough raw rodent for several lifetimes."

"When did you ever eat that?" Severus asks. He picks up the leash and holds it rather more securely as they walk away, thankfully leaving the carcass behind. Severus does not have a weak stomach but he'd still rather not see the dog that sleeps on his bed covered in blood and guts. He'd probably have to bathe him at that point and surely neither of them would enjoy that.

"When I was on the run," Snuffles says and then his raspy laugh comes through. "That other time I was on the run, you know. Compared to then, this time is an absolute luxury. Cooked food, comfortable furniture, a friend to pass the time with."

Severus looks at Snuffles sharply. He feels anger blossom. He was risking his own freedom to house the illegal Animagi. It would be just like him to foolishly risk it all. "Who? One of the students? If anyone finds out-"

"I meant you, you idiot," Snuffles says. There's no bite to the insult and even if there was Severus

would not have noticed. He's too busy processing being called someone's friend. It's the first time in, oh, thirty years.

Fitting that it would come from a dog.

"Let's get back inside," is all Severus says. Minerva has blessedly moved to another booth and Severus sits down in the now empty one.

"Oh, you're back," Rosmerta says, hurrying over to the table. "You brave thing! Here, have another Butterbeer, my treat." Severus is sure that when Albus coughs it is to hide a laugh.

Chapter 4

Severus sets the basket of scrolls on his coffee table and reaches for his favorite quill as he sits down on the sofa. It's a crow feather, pristine condition, and always makes the perfect soothing scratching noise as he slashes the line across the top of a Troll grade.

He's three essays in when Snuffles pads into the room from the hallways. It must be late - Snuffles rarely spends any daylight hours in the dungeon. He says it's depressing.

“Busy?” Snuffles asks as he draws closer. Severus doesn’t answer. He assumes even a dog can deduce that a person bent over parchment and scribbling is, indeed, busy.

It takes only seconds for Severus to again focus on his work and only a few more seconds for his concentration to be absolutely shattered. Snuffles plops down onto the couch as well and places his head on Severus’s thigh.

“What are you doing?” Severus snaps, hand freezing mid-word.

“Will you please pet me?” Severus tells himself that it’s the please that stops him from shoving the dog off. After such good manners, that would be rude. “I told you before, I have this need to be pet. Hermione hasn’t visited since term started. Albus doesn’t try and I can’t ask him to. Please, Severus. I’ve been only mildly annoying lately, haven’t I?”

“You haven’t been annoying at all,” Severus says for no reason other than it’s the truth. And before he has time to talk himself out of it, he reaches out and rubs the top of Snuffles’s head. His fur there is soft and thin and instantly Snuffles’s eyes droop almost closed.

Snuffles doesn’t speak and that makes it easier. Severus pretends it’s just a dog in front of him, not a wizard, not *the* wizard that he knows it is. And if he doesn’t think too hard, it’s actually rather pleasant. Soon he’s running his hand down Snuffles’s back over and over. Snuffles is wagging his tail so hard it hits the couch with a *thump-thump-thump*.

“Thank you,” Snuffles says after several minutes. He finally lifts his head off Severus’s lap. “I know I don’t deserve any kindness from you. After...everything.”

“Is this what it took to humble the great Sirius Black?” Severus asks mockingly. He hasn’t said the full name in months and he doesn’t like the reminder of who Snuffles really is. He feels suddenly on edge, prickly, ready to attack or run.

“Twelve years in Azkaban and four months trapped as a dog while living with my schoolboy rival,” Snuffles says. “Who wouldn’t be humble after that?” Severus knows Snuffles is being kind while he, Severus, is being obstinate and defensive. He has a dozen biting retorts formed, dangling on his tongue, and he forces himself to swallow them back.

“Probably Albus,” is what he says instead and is rewarded for his self-control when Snuffles laughs. Then the dog curls up right where he is on the couch next to Severus, tucks his head back towards his tail, and within moments begins to snore. Severus picks his quill back up and returns to grading.

Severus can’t bring himself to mark anything lower than a D. Failing marks don’t give the same satisfaction when Snuffles is snoring next to him.

Somehow, and rather quickly, the petting becomes a routine.

At first, Severus tells himself he's merely being kind. That excuse quickly wears thin because of the many colorful and varied adjectives that fit him, kind is frankly not one.

He goes through many excuses that are equal part unrealistic and unintelligent before he does something he's rarely done before: he's honest with himself.

He likes petting Snuffles. He's soft and the repetitive motion is soothing.

That's not a sin, is it? And if it is, surely it would be one of the lowest of the many Severus Snape has committed.

So they spend many afternoons on the couch, the wizard petting the wizard who looks like a dog, and the conversations that pass between them become easier each day. Soon they barely share words but merely half-formed thoughts and emotions.

One night in December, the dungeon is very cold. Severus casts a warming spell on his bed but he still shivers under the covers. Snuffles leaps onto the bed as he has many times during the day and this time burrows into the blankets next to Severus. He's instantly many degrees warmer and so he doesn't complain about the fistful of scattered fur he is sure to find in the morning.

He wakes with Snuffles's head tucked against his rib cage and he watches the furry chest rise and fall with an overwhelming feeling of contentment.

Severus can barely detect the odor of dog at this point.

At Christmas, Severus gifts Snuffles a large bone and Snuffles spends the entire day slobbering all over it. Severus is distressed at how adorable he finds the whole thing.

It's a frigid weekend afternoon in January when Albus enters Severus's quarters. He's unannounced and uninvited as usual. He finds Severus and Snuffles stretched out atop a blanket in front of the fire. The book Severus was reading prior to the interruption is cast aside as he scrambles to sit up. Snuffles yawns, snorts, and twitches a paw.

Albus takes in the sight before him and positively beams.

"How can I help you?" Severus asks acidly. He doesn't blush - he trained the reflex out long ago - but he still feels shame roll through his stomach at what the headmaster had seen. He's become so...casual.

"I have wonderful news," Albus announces with so much dramatic flair it is as though he's speaking to two hundred people rather than two. "Sirius, I have determined a way to break the Ministry's hex on your transformation."

Snuffles bolts upright and Severus catches a dozen of his thoughts at once. His own heart begins to beat wildly.

"The only complication is you will never be able to become Padfoot again. You will lose the Animagus ability. May I proceed?" Snuffles barks. Albus looks at Severus to translate and Severus, hearing the triumphant howls in his head, nods.

Albus draws his wand and approaches Snuffles.

Watching, Severus knows it's absurd but he desperately, achingly wants to stop it. Because he

knows how this ends. Snuffles will turn back to Sirius Black and Sirius Black has no reason to spend time with Severus. He'll have other people to talk to, other places to go, his own magic and his own life.

It's selfish and ugly but Severus realizes he wants to keep his companion to himself.

"Here goes," Albus says.

With an incantation, a swoosh, and a loud POP, Sirius Black now sits on the rug.

Sirius jumps to his feet and raises both hands as he lets out a triumphant yell. He spins on the spot. "I'm free!" he cries.

"You're naked," Severus says and Sirius glances down.

"I've been naked for months," he says dismissively and grins.

"Are you two conversing?" Albus asks and Severus realizes they were speaking without talking.

"Old habit," Sirius says breezily, opening his mouth this time. "I guess I should get dressed. Don't want to give anyone an inferiority complex."

"Those are children out there," Severus says reprovingly.

"Right," Sirius says. "I was thinking more, you know, Hagrid. No way he can hope to come close to my *size*."

"You're doing it again," Albus says.

It's all very confusing.

Ten minutes and several interrupted telepathic conversations later, Sirius is escorted to the headmaster's office wearing a pair of Severus's robes. Severus is left alone in his quarters.

It's the first time he's been truly alone in over half a year.

Severus collects all of the things Snuffles used - the red leash, the food and water bowls, the half-chewed Christmas bone. He places them all on the coffee table and sits on the couch. There's still black fur here and there all around the room.

Severus has never been the most attune to his feelings but it doesn't take an empath to know that, without Snuffles, he feels a bit empty.

Chapter 5

“Professor Snape?”

“Hmm?” Severus tears his eyes away from the charmed window in the dungeon. He’d been remembering the time when - it hadn’t seemed funny at the time but now it was quite hilarious - Snuffles had chewed his favorite slippers.

“Are you, er, alright?” It’s a scrawny second year Ravenclaw. She looks equal parts miffed and concerned.

“Ten points from Ravenclaw,” Severus snaps.

“For what?” she gasps as her housemates groan.

“Because life’s not fair,” Severus says darkly. “Now...class dismissed.” The students gape for a moment, looking between their professor and their cauldrons currently bubbling away. “Out!”

The students seize the opportunity. They scurry out whispering and shooting him bewildered looks. Severus Vanishes the contents of the cauldrons with a wave of his wand and falls into the chair at his desk.

Severus has been through a lot in his life. He’s watched Death Eaters murder, he’s experimented in illegal Dark magic, he’s been responsible for his best friend’s death. Yet he’d always been able to turn his emotions off for those. He’d kept functioning. Maybe it was the desire to survive, the threat of the Dark Lord. He was dead now so, really, what was the worst that could happen?

It turns out the Dark Lord has nothing on Albus Dumbledore.

Several days and countless mind-numbing conversations later, Severus has sworn at least a dozen times that he’ll be a better professor. Albus didn’t say better, he said more attentive, equitable, invested. Blah blah blah.

Severus teaches lessons with the mask firmly back in place but when he’s in his quarters he still misses the damn dog.

It’s mid-February when Severus receives an owl. The rumpled parchment falls on his plate during breakfast and Severus picks it up.

A pouch of coffee grinds fall out. Bemused, he opens the letter.

Snape,

Here’s the Christmas present I couldn’t get you before when I was, you know, a dog.

I’ll be in Hogsmeade next weekend if you’d like to catch up. Three Broomsticks at noon? I promise it will be better than the staff party.

-Sirius

PS I’ve decided officially that coffee is awful and you can’t convince me otherwise.

Severus puts down the letter and is horrified to realize he’s smiling.

He goes to Hogsmeade and finds Sirius Black sitting in a booth at the Three Broomsticks. It's different than before, of course. Sirius is a human. But something about him is still welcoming and comfortable. The old bitterness and fury doesn't stir at the mere sight.

Severus sits down and when they speak neither man opens his mouth. The words flow quickly, passing back and forth practically before each sentence is finished.

“How have you been?” Sirius asks and Severus snorts.

“I’m still teaching so somewhere between abominable and suicidal.”

“Why don’t you quit?” Sirius asks.

“And do what?” Severus asks in return.

“Anything else,” Sirius says. “You could come travel with me. I have my family’s gold plus the Azkaban reparations and nothing but time.”

Severus shoots this proposal down and they keep talking. The conversation is pleasant and Severus never once dwells on their past. He’s too happy just to have the familiar company.

Later, in bed, Severus does dwell. On the entire conversation but especially on Sirius saying *travel with me*.

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It’s their third Hogsmeade rendezvous when Sirius says, “You know I still can’t figure out how Albus lifted the hex. Have you asked him?”

“You may think the world revolves around you, Black, but we actually don’t talk about you.” *Much*, Severus silently amends.

“Ha ha,” Sirius says. “Yes, I’m an egomaniac, very clever. But seriously. When I asked him, he just kept offering me lemon drops.”

“No we haven’t discussed it,” Severus says. “No doubt he came across it in a book.”

“I have a theory,” Sirius says, “that he always knew how to lift it.”

“To what end would he keep you trapped as Snuffles, then?”

Sirius grimaces and gestures between them. “This.”

“This what?” Severus asks

“Come on, Snape. Our friendship! You know Albus is nothing if not very sentimental and very manipulative,” Sirius says.

“Quite,” Severus answers. He can feel Sirius’s frustration at his reticence but Severus doesn’t want to speculate.

He does, however, leave The Three Broomsticks and go straight to Albus’s office. He finds the headmaster sitting at his desk, playing the flute. It takes several minutes for him to finish, lay down the instrument, and smile.

“What an unexpected pleasure, Severus. How may I help you?” Dumbledore asks.

“Black thinks you left him trapped as Snuffles so we would become friends.” Severus has learned through trial and error that bluntness is best when speaking to the headmaster.

Albus picks up the flute and begins to play again. The notes are a tiny bit more screechy now.

“Albus.” Albus shrugs as though he’s helpless to stop playing. “I’m going to take this as an admission of guilt.”

Albus lowers the flute and sighs. “I may have used an unfortunate circumstance to bring two lonely people together. Are you sorry that I did?”

Severus admits, only to himself, that he’s not.

Out loud he says, “This is going to be my last term at Hogwarts.”

Albus looks genuinely startled. His hand twitches on the flute and he looks at the dusty bowl of lemon drops with a furrowed brow.

“I have never been able to convince you of anything,” Albus says, “so I won’t embarrass myself by trying now. Where will you go, old friend?”

Severus shrugs but in his mind he sees half-formed visions of tropical beaches, bustling cities, and a certain black haired man.

Chapter 6

It's June and Severus arrives at Diagon Alley with a purpose. It's an embarrassing one, to be sure, and he flirted with the idea of fulfilling it under the aid of Polyjuice potion. Ultimately he couldn't think of anyone worthy to transform into.

So now he simply walks through the throng of shoppers and hopes his scowl is menacing enough to fend off any unwanted attention.

He's fooling himself, of course. No one is the least bit interested in what he's doing. He passes through the streets completely unmolested.

Severus reaches his destination and opens the door. He's greeted with the cheery tinkling of a bell and a young witch looks up from where she's brushing a tabby cat. It's a former student, a Hufflepuff perhaps, and Severus can't remember her name. He doesn't try very hard.

"Professor Snape?" she says uncertainly. "Can I help you?"

"I want a dog," he says. Her brows knit together.

"We don't sell dogs. Magical ones are too unpredictable. It's the wolf ancestry." She finally stops brushing and the cat meows in protest. She pulls an apologetic face as the cat leaps off the counter and disappears off the shelf. Then she yanks open a drawer beneath the cash register and removes a sheet of parchment and a quill.

"Here," she says and scribbles a couple words down. "This is a Muggle animal shelter not too far from the Leaky Cauldron. My sister volunteers there over holidays. She said they have some puppies in."

An hour later, Severus is staring down at a puddle of puppies, mesmerized. None of them have quite the appeal of Snuffles, of course, but they're damn adorable. Severus works very hard to keep a coo from escaping his lips.

One puppy begins to gnaw on another's ear and they roll around in a playful tussle. A third puppy barks, jumps to its feet, and promptly faceplants into the hard shelter floor. Severus winces in sympathy but the little thing merely lurches back up and sits there, completely unbothered. Its tail wags furiously as it looks around and Severus kneels down to stroke the soft white and brown fur. He's rewarded with several licks on the back of his hand.

"I think she's chosen you," the volunteer chirps, beaming. Severus rubs the puppy's floppy ears and feels at peace.

"It seems that way," he agrees and scoops her up in his arms. He pays for the puppy and all her supplies and by the time he arrives home, he's decided on a name.

"Let me get this straight," Sirius says the next day. "You decided, the day before we leave, to adopt a puppy, without discussing it with me, and you named her...*Chrysanthemum*?"

"Don't say her name that way," Severus says, drawing the puppy closer to his body protectively.

"Which way?" Sirius asks.

"That not nice way!"

“Severus Snape is lecturing me on being nice, and he adopted a puppy. Will wonders never cease?” Sirius drops into the armchair, the leg of which Chrysanthemum, now placed on the floor, is furiously chewing. “How did you pick the name, anyway?”

“It’s a flower,” Severus says. Their conversation is flowing so quickly that Severus doesn’t pause to think of an excuse. He regrets the truth as soon as it flows from his mind to Sirius’s.

“Like Lily,” he says sourly and Severus looks away, feeling embarrassed. “After all this time?”

“She was my friend,” Severus says. “And what importance is it to you?”

There’s a flash of something indecipherable from Sirius, an emotion not put to words. Severus barely has time to register the mysterious reaction before Chrysanthemum squats and pees on his bare foot. He leaps to his feet, scowling - at Sirius, who is howling with laughter, because he can’t bring himself to scowl at his puppy.

“Maybe Chryssy isn’t so bad,” Sirius says as Severus spells his foot clean.

“This is nothing compared to what another dog did to my carpet,” Severus says darkly and it’s a sign of how much things have changed that Sirius merely grins at the memory instead of ducking in shame. Severus is just grateful they’ve moved on from Lily and he allows the conversation to slip into an argument on whether or not they need to pack fur-lined cloaks.

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“Excuse me?” Severus asks. He musters up his very best scathing Professor Snape, “about to deduct one hundred points from Gryffindor and send your mother a Howler,” voice. The teenage clerk on the other side of the counter scratches his belly and yawns.

“No vacancies,” he repeats dully.

“We have a *reservation*,” Severus says. Perhaps the boy is dim-witted or hard of hearing. “Res-er-va-tion,” he repeats, loudly and slowly.

“No vacancies.”

Severus growls in the back of his throat.

“I don’t think he speaks English,” Sirius says as he approaches Severus, Chrysanthemum in his arms, a leash dangling uselessly from her collar. She hates being walked and far prefers to be carried place to place. “I saw a pub down the street, let’s go there and see if we can find another place to stay.”

Severus glowers at the clerk but, with only minor grumbling, turns and follows Sirius out of the inn.

“You know,” Sirius says as they walk the streets, quiet and empty due to the late time, “I don’t think you’re quite cut out for travel.”

“I’m trying,” Severus says through gritted teeth.

“You have been,” Sirius agrees, shifting Chrysanthemum to his other arm. “But it’s been one unfortunate incident after another, hasn’t it?”

Severus says nothing because he truly has been trying to be accomodating, probably more than

he'd ever tried to be anything in his life. He hadn't complained when they spent 18 hours trapped in a tomb in Egypt. He'd stayed quiet when they'd slept on lumpy beds in the same room as twenty other smelly, noisy people. He'd even mildly enjoyed the many hours trampling through forests and alongside rivers.

But now all he really wants is a hot shower, a fresh meal, and a clean place to sleep.

"We could just go home," Sirius says. It's infuriating how he manages to catch so many of Severus's thoughts unintentionally. The reverse never seems to happen.

"We could go home?" Severus asks. He's feeling obstinate. "You would go to Grimmauld Place and I'd go to Spinner's End."

"I could go with you," Sirius says. "I wasn't such a bad house guest before, was I?"

"Chrysanthemum will fulfill all my social needs," Severus says.

"That is possibly the saddest thing I've ever heard and I spent twelve years in Azkaban." Severus smiles despite the frustration and exhaustion.

"At least Azkaban had a reliable bed," Severus says.

"No pubs though," Sirius says as they enter the doors of one. The pub is almost as still as the streets. There's a few people scattered in booths, clutching drinks and conversing in low tones. The bartender smokes a pipe as he watches them approach. Sirius manages to order and pay for two drinks and they sit down at a table. Chrysanthemum plops down and rests her head on Severus's shoe.

"What I wouldn't give for a pot of coffee right now," Severus says as he eyes the dusty glass.

"Chin up," Sirius says. He lifts the glass and gulps it down without a breath. "We can go our separate ways after this. Just have one last drink with me."

The thought twists Severus's stomach. He regrets his earlier words but doesn't know where to begin to take them back. So he answers Sirius by downing his own drink.

An hour later, they're both thoroughly sloshed, too much so to Apparate. The bartender speaks enough English to point them in the direction of a room for rent. The house they find is still lit up despite the late hour and the room is available just as promised.

Chrysanthemum bounds inside and quickly finds a comfortable spot to curl up in. The room is clean enough but Severus spots a glaring issue immediately.

"There's only one bed," Severus says, looking between it and Sirius. "I'm not sleeping on the floor."

"We could Ennervate ourselves and Apparate home," Sirius suggests.

"Ennervate only masks the feelings of alcohol, Black, we'd still be at risk for splinching. That's basic magical information."

"My apologies, your majesty," Sirius says and bows. Then he chuckles. "That didn't make any sense did it?"

"So where are you sleeping?" Severus asks and Sirius thrusts a finger toward the bed.

“There,” Sirius says. “And so are you. We’ve shared a bed before. I looked like a dog but it was still me. We can do it again for one night.”

Severus feels that he really should protest but the only other solution he can think of is to transfigure something and he thinks he’s not sober enough to even try.

“Fine,” is all he says. He turns away from Sirius to dress for sleep and then climbs into bed next to him.

Despite the prior exhaustion and current inebriation, Severus suddenly can’t sleep. It’s true they shared a bed before but it’s also true that, whatever Sirius says, Snuffles was different. The bed is small and they are almost touching. Severus has not been this close to another human in many years and because of that his body is hyperaware of his companion.

“Can’t sleep?” Sirius asks after several minutes.

“Seems that way,” Severus answers. The nice thing about their mental connection is they don’t have to worry about waking Chrysanthemum.

“Are you really done travelling?”

“I believe it’s time,” Severus says.

“I enjoyed it,” Sirius says. There’s a slight movement and Severus is shocked into stillness when he feels fingers on the back of his hand.

“Are we holding hands?” Severus asks. In a different time it would have been merely a thought but Sirius hears everything now, of course.

“Yes,” Sirius says. “Goodnight.”

Severus doesn’t know why but he doesn’t pull away. The weight and heat of Sirius’s hand is comforting and somehow, rather quickly, he falls asleep.

Chapter 7

“Check,” Severus says and looks up from the board. His smirk quickly falls. “What? What’s wrong?”

Sirius is staring very intensely at Severus and he doesn’t stop as he answers, “I forfeit.”

“What?” Severus asks again.

“I don’t want to play anymore.” Sirius shoves the board to the floor. “I hate chess.”

“You are discovering this now? We have spent approximately one hundred hours playing chess,” Severus says. He looks down at the scattered pieces and back to Sirius. “Have you hit your head? Snuck some of my coffee?”

“I’ve always hated chess,” Sirius says. “Remus used to beg me to play and sometimes I would, only so I could sneak in an exploding pawn. He got wise after a couple times and stopped trying.”

“I am utterly confused.”

“I know,” Sirius says. “Want to walk Chryssy with me?”

They take the dog out. Over the three weeks they’d been back, she’s grown more accustomed to her leash. She trots beside them, tail wagging, ears flopping with each step. Severus watches her and tries to figure out what’s wrong with Sirius.

They come across a patch of wildflowers and Chrysanthemum stops to sniff them. Sirius watches her and chews his lip.

“If you don’t like chess, you only had to say so,” Severus says.

Sirius looks up from the dog and his face has that same strange fierceness. Severus is frustrated once again that he can’t read Sirius’s emotions and subtle thoughts easily. After a lifetime of masterful Legilimency, it doesn’t make sense. What was the barrier? “It’s that you don’t want to understand.” Sirius answers the unasked question, maddeningly.

“Of course I do,” Severus snaps. “I don’t like being in the dark. If you have something to say, just say it.”

“I don’t have anything to say,” Sirius says. “I just want to do this.” He reaches out and takes Severus’s hand, as he had that last night abroad. Severus hadn’t forgotten but he had buried it. They’d never discussed it or repeated. Severus had mostly convinced himself it was a dream or alcohol-fueled delusion.

Now they stand on a cracked sidewalk in the middle of the day, hands linked, and Severus is at a loss.

“And this,” Sirius adds. He steps up closer; Severus tenses. He realizes what is going to happen only milliseconds before it does. Sirius’s lips come to his, softly, as he keeps his grip on Severus’s hand. Severus is frozen as he feels Sirius’s other arm come around him and the pressure of his lips becomes more firm.

Then Severus melts. It all clicks into place. He brings up his own unoccupied hand to thread it

through Sirius's hair and returns the kiss, hard. For the first time in over a year, his mind is silent, and instead he is overwhelmed by sensation, feeling, his and Sirius's meeting and melding into one fiery ball. He perceives the kiss through his own lips but also through Sirius's and the combination leaves him weak-kneed and breathless when they eventually, finally separate.

"You know," Severus says, "I never thought about doing that to Snuffles."

"I would hope not," Sirius says. He's grinning and he hasn't let go of Severus's hand.

"Just to clear that up," Severus says. "No bestiality here."

"Hear that, Chryssy? You're safe."

Eventually, they realize they are standing on a public street holding hands and grinning like a pair of lovesick teenagers. They let go and walk Chrysanthemum back but don't worry, dear reader. Back in the privacy of the home that was once Severus's and soon would be theirs, they have plenty of time to hold hands - among other things.

They live a happy little life within those walls, one you would never have expected if you'd seen them cursing each other once upon a time in the halls of Hogwarts. Lucky for you, you joined them when all that was over, when a meddling sentimental fool and a clever but uninformed witch brought them together through a series of happy accidents.

Severus and Sirius do not know for sure the happiness that lies before them but they know contentment each day and that is enough to keep moving, keep trying, and keep, of course, kissing.

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